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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telcon with President Putin of Russia

PARTICIPANTS: The President
President Putin

Notetakers: Chris Legrand, David Lee, and
Jeff Blair

Interpreter: Peter Afanasenko

DATE, TIME: March 24, 2003, 10:15 - 10:42 a.m. EST
AND PLACE: Oval Office

The President: Vladimir, good to hear from you. (U)

President Putin: I am glad to hear you, good morning. (U)

The President: Thank you for calling. (U)

President Putin: Thank you very much for responding so swiftly to my request. There are a few issues that I would like to discuss with you. The first set of issues concerns Iraq and the second concerns our bilateral relationship. We have received information from the State Department regarding your concerns of alleged supplies of military and specialized equipment into Iraq. I am calling to tell you specifically that there have been no shipments of such items to Iraq. Of course, we are going to check all the information of any kind to confirm this. Any names of companies that you give us, we will check very carefully. If we do find anything at all of this kind, these people will be subject to Russia's criminal code and will be duly prosecuted. I doubt it, but I repeat that we will check everything. Several times we have discussed similar issues with regard to Iran. We received information from the U.S., including the possible procurement of aluminum tubes by Iran that could be used for enriching Uranium. Right now, according to the information from the IAEA, which has not been publicized, they found that Iran indeed does have these items. This coincides with our information. However, these items have been

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supplied to Iran by a company called Urenco ltd. and this is an English, German, and Dutch company. I want to remind you that our intelligence services gave you information on some U.S. and other companies that have been involved in supplying both Iraq and Iran. I believe that we need to continue to cooperate with respect to both of these countries, but I realize that Iraq is the priority. I would like to assure you that we are going to work objectively and actively on this account. (S)

The President: I appreciate that. (U)

President Putin: The second issue concerns the plans that we discussed to deploy a refugee camp to accommodate refugees that might be fleeing across the border into Iran. I would like to tell you about this and if there is any interest on your part, then our services can talk to each other about ways to cooperate in this area. The second question concerns the following: there are unfortunately some POWs, including U.S. soldiers. I have instructed Foreign Minister Ivanov to contact the Iraqis and to get them to implement the Geneva conventions. In this context, I have a proposal; however, it will be implemented only if you are interested. If this makes sense to you, if you find it useful, then we will have our Russian Ambassador meet with the Iraqis so that he can demand to be allowed to meet in Baghdad with the U.S. prisoners of war. I have not discussed this with Iraq and have not told anyone else about this. I have only discussed this with my Foreign Minister. If you find this useful, let us know. The next issue concerns our bilateral relations and does not concern Iraq. In spite of present differences, we should look for ways to demonstrate the positive sides of our good relations. The Minister of Agriculture, Gordeyev, received an invitation from his U.S. counterpart Veneman, and I would like to confirm that Mr. Gordeyev is willing to fly to Washington at the earliest time possible. If you find this necessary and useful, then we could report it as one of the issues discussed in today's conversation. The last thing is that the situation is now complicated and tough for you. I know you are having a hard time with those in the domestic arena and also with diplomatic relations. If you find this necessary then we could discuss all these issues, including our bilateral relationship. I would be willing to meet with you face to face, preferably in a third country, if you feel this makes sense. (S)

The President: Let me work backwards. Let me think about the meeting. It is an interesting idea. What is interesting, Vladimir, is that at home, I have never been more popular.

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Interestingly enough, the American people are in solid support. My approval rating is currently at 75 percent, which is remarkable. I readily concede that in certain countries around the world, I am not that popular, but I doubt I ever will be, so I am not trying. If you are from Texas, then it makes people nervous, but the good news is that you don't get nervous. Secondly, I think that it is a good idea regarding the Agricultural Minister. Thirdly, let me talk to people about the POW issue. It is interesting. Let me talk to the appropriate people, and Colin Powell will take over the issue. I view this as a very kind gesture and I appreciate it. Along the same lines, we will discuss the idea of refugee camps in Iran but, so far, there have not been many refugees. It may make sense. I appreciate your objective look into the information on arms transfers that we think is very valid. In like vein, we will do the same with information you are providing us on Iran. Many in the world are trying to strain our relations. I am saying that there is speculation in the press that many people in the Governments of France and Germany would like us to have strained relations. There is great speculation in the American press of the new French-German-Russian alliance to the detriment of the United States. I don't believe that is true until I hear that directly from you because I believe that our relations are strong. I do have one concern and that is that Igor Ivanov is thinking about putting down a resolution condemning U.S. actions in Iraq. I certainly hope that this is not true because that would cause people to think that there is a problem with U.S.-Russian relations. It seems that a better way is to show that we are working together in coming up with something that would show that we are working together to ensure the continuation of the oil-for-food program. I remember when we first began our relations, we both lamented the fact that there were people on both sides, in both our governments, who would very much like our relations to fall back on a cold war mentality. The thing that made your vision and my vision different is that going into the 21st century, we realized that the cold war mentality must stop. I am still dedicated to that principle. I really appreciate what you said earlier in the conversation that we would have disagreements and this will happen but we must dedicate ourselves to a way which is constructive. I very much so feel that way. That is all I have to say except to thank you for calling. We need to keep in touch and I appreciate your ideas. (N)

President Putin: Just a couple of words in response to what you said. It is true that our approach to the Iraq problem has diverged instead of returning it to a peaceful framework. Like

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you, I cherish the level of cooperation that we achieved, due to our special relationship. Russia will not call for a Security Council meeting and will not call for a resolution that you mentioned. In response to an alliance against America, I believe that both of us are grown up guys. We love fairy tales but we don't believe in them. (S)

The President: Very good. (U)

President Putin: I wish you all the best and take note in regard to how you are doing at home. There are problems that you are experiencing and I would like to wish you all the best. I am familiar with such problems because of my experience with the dire situation in Chechnya. By the way, we would like to tell you that there was a referendum in Chechnya regarding whether they want to be part of Russia and they have decided to stay part of the Russian Federation. That is a very positive development. (S)

The President: Thank you. I knew you were working on that. Thank you for your personal concern. The toughest decision for a President to make is the decision to send troops into combat. We will stay in touch. These conversations are important for me. (S)

President Putin: Okay, George, let's stay in touch. Thank you very much. (U)

The President: Okay, sir. Thank you. (U)

-End of Conversation--

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